

Colon cancer survivor and Idaho spokesperson Karen Echeverria stood in the Boise YMCA dressing room. Her poster, “A Colon Cancer Test Saved My Life,” was displayed in a few spots around the YMCA. A woman took her by the shoulders and said, “You saved my life!” She explained she had seen Karen’s posters about colon cancer screening and finally decided she should have a colonoscopy. Precancerous polyps were found and removed, and she was doing fine.

Problem

In 2004, only 37.9% of Idahoans over 50 reported having had a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy within the past 5 years, and Idaho ranked near the bottom of all states for colon cancer screening (BRFSS 2004). In 2006, the Idaho Comprehensive Cancer Alliance (CCAI) selected increasing colon cancer screening as their number one priority from the objectives in the Idaho Comprehensive Cancer Strategic Plan when the plan was completed in 2006.

Program Description

Between fall 2007 and spring 2008, the Idaho Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (ICCCP) held focus groups and gathered other input from stakeholders, and developed a media campaign based on those findings. The campaign uses two colorectal cancer survivors for a testimonial-based campaign. Media pieces include radio and newspaper advertisements, video interviews with the survivors, billboards, and print materials including posters, trifold brochures (in English and Spanish), two bookmarks (one male and one female survivor), and business-card sized message cards. The state program purchased media to reach all Idaho residents in spring 2008 and 2009. Ads provide the 2-1-1 Idaho CareLine phone number that people can call for a packet of materials from the state, the American Cancer Society, and CDC.

In 2007, the ICCCP contracted with all seven of Idaho’s local health departments to increase awareness about colorectal cancer (CRC) and promote screening in their districts. Local health departments and their partners’ activities to address CRC include:

- Outreach to physicians and other health professionals and professional education (conferences, classroom education, surveys, staff education, physician newsletters, and distribution of CRC physician materials packets).
- Policy work to increase screening coverage through worksite insurance plans.
- Local media interviews on radio, television news, and health programming, and newspaper and newsletter articles. Many are using local survivor stories. *Screen for Life* public service announcements were also promoted.
- Public education through presentations at worksites, community groups, faith-based groups, and health events.
- Outreach booths through employer and community health and benefit fairs, community events, and coordinated campaigns at worksites.
- Integration with other chronic diseases through educational events, and distribution of materials and information at diabetes groups, prostate cancer events, senior fitness and fall prevention classes, and at skin cancer screenings.
- Generating partner donations of fecal occult blood testing kits.
- Materials distribution at worksites, community organizations, pharmacies, senior centers, fitness centers, and libraries.

2008 BRFSS data show that the percentage of Idahoans over 50 reporting having had a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy within the past 4 years increased to 45.4%. Because of national efforts and general increased awareness, the increase may not be due only to efforts in Idaho; thousands of Idahoans have been reached through local channels and state-specific media.

The Idaho CareLine received this call from a woman who heard the radio advertisement regarding colon cancer in March 2009:

“My husband went to his primary doctor and asked if he should get a colonoscopy. His doctor said no, not necessary. He was 54 years old. Eight months later,

Stories of Success

he was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer. He died 2 weeks ago. I just wanted to say thank you for the

awareness regarding this issue and that people over the age of 50 should be pushed to get screened.”

“My husband went to his primary doctor and asked if he should get a colonoscopy. His doctor said no, not necessary.... Eight months later, he was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer.”

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🌐 <http://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Health/DiseasesConditions/Cancer/tabid/178/default.aspx>